

**SEPA Annual Meeting  
Chair's Report  
March 1, 2013-February 28, 2014**

Last year, during the 2012-13 fiscal year, the SEPA Board reorganized and reassigned many roles. I am delighted to report that the resulting strong success we enjoyed last year has been surpassed.

As many of you know, the Santa Elena project of Accompaniment (SEPA) is a coalition of individuals, churches and organizations in Oberlin and NE Ohio who support human rights workers in Guatemala and are building committed relationships with two indigenous returned refugee villages in northwestern Guatemala. SEPA's mission is to support human rights workers in Guatemala as well as to assist with educational scholarships, teacher salaries and other needs as requested in the villages of Santa Elena 20 de Octubre and Copal AA la Esperanza. We understand that access to quality education is a vital foundation for the achievement of basic human rights.

SEPA's support for accompaniment continued into the first half of 2013 with Erik Woodward's work during the genocide trial of Rios Mont From March 19-May 10, 2013. Erik's experience was badly needed. More recently, he joined the NISGUA staff, serving as Interim Exec. Director during ED's Bridget Bohren's sabbatical from January to April 2014. Erik has not yet returned to the United States, but we hope to bring him to Oberlin to talk this fall.

The Guatemala Accompaniment Project (GAP) is the organizational sector of the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA). GAP trains and supports human rights observers from the US and Canada. Bill and Barbara Fuchsman attended the Annual GAP Gathering in August 2013 held on Bainbridge Island near Seattle, WA. At the meeting, the trial of Rios Montt was discussed in detail along with the fact that the guilty verdict was overturned by Guatemala's politically controlled Constitutional Court. The guilty verdict still remains a strongly meaningful "signpost" for the common people, especially for those able at last to publically testify to the horrors they experienced. NISGUA played an important role by keeping the witnesses safe.

SEPA also can be proud of Santa Elena's contribution in the trial. Santiago Choc Cu is from Santa Elena. While he has stubbornly pursued his university education since 1997 every SEPA delegation has learned from him. Now he has become a lawyer, and was a member of the prosecution team during the trial. The NISGUA people at the trial were extremely proud of him, as are we.

Our web mistress and newsletter editor, Sue Simonson, kept the SEPA website wonderfully up to date during the trial as always. SEPA published 5 newsletters during the past year and updated our brochure.

In September, Santa Elena's Education Committee submitted their request for scholarship support which continued at last year's levels. They asked for 29 scholarships. 5 students plan to graduate this year. SEPA raised and delivered the \$11,574 needed.

At the same time, the Board approved two solicitations from Santa Elena: we agreed to help fund the completion of the Women's Center and to rent costumes for the Dance of the Deer.

These unusual expenses could be approved because SEPA received unexpected gifts. The Oberlin College Dept. of Chemistry donated \$3095 in honor of Bill Fuchsman's retirement. Another large donation was given soon after the request to finish the Women's Center was made. Other donations from individuals continued to be strong, and we received generous contributions from the First Church, UCC, the Oberlin UU Fellowship and the Oberlin Society of Friends.

The second annual Appreciation Dinner held in September at the Oberlin Depot helped to build a sense of community and to keep our supporters familiar with SEPA's activities. February's Annual Fund Raising Dinner, celebrating the return of the January delegation was great fun and a terrific success.

For the first time in many years, the Board decided we could bring a NISGUA speaker to Oberlin. To support the speaker NISGUA asked for a contribution of \$400/day. With generous help from Oberlin College's departments of History and Politics, Mayan rights leader Anselmo Roldán Aguilar, President of Guatemala's Association for Justice and Reconciliation visited Oberlin in November as one stop in a ten city US speaking tour. Mr. Roldán and his translator Ellen Moore met with students and faculty at Oberlin College and gave a free public program, "Justice for Genocide, A Survivor's Story." The talk raised an additional \$223 from the audience for Sr. Roldán's organization.

John Gates and Bill Fuchsman organized a very successful Winter Term delegation to Guatemala. Seven students, accompanied by John Gates and Rob Motley visited both Santa Elena and Copal AA, met with Santiago Choc, and visited the gorge of the Rio Chixoy.

Once again, language training was held in Santa Elena bringing work and income to the villagers and making possible a longer and more in depth visit for the delegations. The new road has been completed and electricity has come to Santa Elena. SEPA provided \$400 to electrify the school. The Women's Center has been completed and is being put to good use. The Dance of the Deer was performed for the Oberlin delegation. The goodbye party for the delegations, a grand affair, was held in the new Women's Center.

Support for teachers also continues. SEPA provides monthly partial supplements for two teachers in Santa Elena's primary school. We sent a total of \$2,654 to help teachers and staff in the Copal AA middle school. SEPA, through the generosity of an anonymous donor, supports a small-scale scholarship program at Copal AA for students to attend high school.